

Governor Rendell Joins National Anti-Sweatshop Initiative

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Contact: Bjorn Claeson

Tel. 207-262-7277

Three Governors Take Lead in Coalition to End Tax Subsidies of Sweatshops

Rendell's Action Responsive to, Lauded by Diverse Coalition

September 16 – Today Pennsylvania Governor Edward G. Rendell announced that he is joining a path-breaking governors' initiative to end sweatshop exploitation in apparel and other industries. Proposed by Governor John E. Baldacci of Maine, the Governors' Coalition for Sweatfree Procurement and Workers' Rights will use state government procurement as a catalyst to level the playing field for ethical businesses and advance justice for sweatshop workers. Deputy Secretary for Workforce Development Sandi Vito made the announcement at an anti-sweatshop educational event in Harrisburg, hosted by the Coalition of Black Trade Unionists.

"We must not encourage companies that use sweatshops by doing business with them," Pennsylvania Governor Edward G. Rendell said. "If companies know they will lose money by continuing to employ this industrial-age practice, they will stop. Businesses can still make money by treating their employees fairly."

"There's power in numbers," added Governor John E. Baldacci. "If we team up with other states we'll have even more influence in the global marketplace. Workers around the world deserve any influence or leverage we can bring to the table."

Governor Rendell's announcement follows last week's news that New Jersey Governor Jon Corzine also will participate in the Coalition. Pennsylvania, New Jersey, and Maine all have made previous commitments to sweatshop-free procurement through legislation that includes a code of conduct requiring state contractors and subcontractors of apparel and other products to adhere to basic international fair labor standards. Other public entities with similar legislation include the states of California, Illinois, and New York, and over 60 cities, counties, and school districts.

By acting together, states and other public entities can increase resources for investigating sweatshop conditions and coordinate enforcement of sweatfree procurement policies. According to SweatFree Communities, a worker rights organization that coordinates a nationwide campaign for a State and Local Government Sweatfree Consortium, five U.S. cities, including Los Angeles and San Francisco, have also expressed interest in collaborating with other public entities to enforce sweatfree procurement legislation.

Governor Rendell's announcement drew praise from a wide range of worker rights advocates and businesses, including garment workers' unions, public sector unions, civil rights organizations, student groups, and apparel contractors that had requested Governor Rendell to join the Coalition.

"The sewing machine operators, pressers, and cutters who work in the Pennsylvania garment industry applaud Governor Rendell's continued support of sweat-free procurement." said Gail Meyer Vice President of Pennsylvania Joint Board UNITE HERE. "We are looking forward to working closely with the Governor in this new Coalition."

"This is about exporting Pennsylvania's high standards for workers' rights throughout the global economy and creating a fair playing field that starts with respect for the human rights of workers everywhere," said Celeste Taylor, Pittsburgh Anti-Sweatshop Community Alliance's representative to the SweatFree Communities Board and a member of the Black Political Empowerment Project's Planning Council. "This is an extension of the historic role of Pennsylvania's Abolitionist and Labor Union movements. The Governor takes a profound step forward by doing what is necessary to strictly enforce the 2004 Anti-Sweatshop Executive Order and offering to collaborate with other governmental jurisdictions to do so."

More information about the campaign for a State and Local Government Sweatfree Consortium is available at: <http://www.sweatfree.org/sweatfreeconsortium>